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How Do You Feel Hashem In Front Of You At All Times?

For whatever reason that this has happened, one of the elderly leaders of our generation has left the world today.^[1] It was said of him that he was a person who saw the *Ribono shel Olam*^[2] in front of him at all times, even as he casually walked through the streets. He kept the very first words of the *Rema*^[3] in front of him at all times: “*Shivisi Hashem L’Negdi Tamid*” – “Hashem is opposite me, always.”

People have a hard time understanding the concept of *Shivisi Hashem L’Negdi Tamid*. If this was only the *mitzvah* we had, then perhaps it would be easier to fulfill this *mitzvah*; although we are very busy and we have to be involved with this materialistic world and with taking care of our household, our body can be on the earth while our mind and heart is focused on our inner dimension. Depending on how much spiritual purity and holiness one has reached, a person can live this way and be able to handle these contradicting aspects of our life.

But we are commanded to learn Torah, and to immerse ourselves in it day and night. Our mind and heart needs to be involved in it. So if we always place Hashem in front of us at all times, how then can we concentrate on our Torah learning? This is especially a question due to the fact that our main obligation [especially as *bonei Torah*] that we have on this world is to learn Torah and exert ourselves fully in it, with all our mental capacity.

Exertion In Torah Learning: Where Is Hashem In The Picture?

Those who truly learn Torah with exertion are those who immerse their entire soul in it, in all aspects; it is a world to immerse oneself in, and when one is found there, he feels that this is his true place. When one is truly learning Torah and with dedication, his entire mind and heart is immersed in it, and he finds *Bein HaZemanim* to be difficult, because it is hard to leave the place you identify yourself with and go to another place. Those who aren't that immersed in their learning don't really feel this as an issue, but those who are truly immersed in their learning, with their entire being, are familiar with this difficulty.

But we must know that our main obligation on this world - exertion in Torah learning - *does not* mean that we are exempt from leading an *inner kind of life*; from reaching the depth of life. For there is depth and depth to the life in front of us that we must uncover; we can go deeper and deeper into the meaning of our life. An inner kind of life means to live a life spent with Hashem, to feel that we are in front of Him and with Him.

The difficulty people have with this, however, is: if we are learning Torah all day and we are totally applying ourselves to it as much as we can, then how do we always focus on placing Hashem in front of us at all times? How do you put Hashem in front of you all the time, when your task is clearly to place all your mental focus on in-depth study of the Gemara?[\[4\]](#)

The question, however, is really erroneous to begin with. It is because we need to understand how life is really supposed to look like, and then we won't see this as an issue.

The Opportunity of Bein HaZemanim

Firstly, in order to understand this, we need to know that Hashem has arranged the setup of the year with normal *zemanim* (times) of the year, as well as times where we are taken out of the normal routine, such as *Bein HaZemanim*. Both of them have their pros and cons.

During the *zman* (the normal routine of the year), there are pros and cons. The advantage of it is that it enables us to have a structure. The drawback, however, is that we are confined to time, which places certain limits on our time. We need to use all our time during the *zman* for Torah learning, and this leaves us with almost no time to enter deeper within ourselves and to discover our inner spiritual world.

Bein HaZemanim affords us the opportunity to have more time on our hands to enter our inner, spiritual world within us, and to search for the purpose of life, to wonder and reflect about it. It is essentially another kind of *zman* that Hashem gives us, though it is not the normal kind of *zman* that we know of from the rest of the year. The normal routine of the year doesn't allow for this deep soul-searching, whereas *Bein HaZemanim* was given to us to take a break from the normal routine of the year and we have more time to ourselves.

Although we must certainly learn Torah during *Bein HaZemanim* – and with exertion – we do not nearly have as much exertion in learning as during the *zman*. During the *zman*, our learning is much more intense, with 3 or 4 or 5 *sedarim* (learning sessions) a day, with very in-depth study. During *Bein HaZemanim*, although we must certainly learn Torah, we don't have these many *sedarim* that we have during the *zman*. It is intentional that it be this way. It is because *Bein HaZemanim* is given to us so that we can get in touch with an inner place in ourselves and become closer to Hashem. It is a time where one clarifies to himself how an inner kind of life should look like.

The Inner Kind of Life

How, indeed, is an 'inner kind of life' supposed to look like?

First of all, before anything else, a person has to make sure he is keeping all of *Halacha*. Those are the basics. But this applies universally to each Jew, whether he is living internally or not. So although keeping *Halacha* is unquestionably essential, one's adherence to *Halacha* does not yet mean that he is living a true, inner kind of life. It is rather the prerequisite to the inner kind of life.

Besides for making sure that we are keeping all of *Halacha*, and besides for our main obligation of exertion in Torah learning from morning until night and to grow in knowledge of Torah (each to his own, and as much as is capable), we are taught by the Sages that there are certain qualities which our Torah learning must bring us to. The sage Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair taught: "Torah brings a person to *zehirus* (watchfulness), *zerizus* (alacrity), *nekiyus* (cleanliness from sin and evil motivations), *perishus* (abstinence), *taharah* (spiritual purity), *chassidus* (piety), humility, fear of sin, holiness, resurrecting the dead, and *Ruach HaKodesh*".[\[5\]](#)

Torah brings a person to all of these high levels; but what if a person's Torah learning is not causing

him to have more *zehirus* (watchfulness) and *zerizus* (alacrity)? What if a person is learning Torah yet it is not causing him to become enthused to serve Hashem? What if a person is learning Torah yet it is not causing him to gain more *taharah* (spiritual purity), to at least some minimal level of *perishus* (abstinence from indulgence), to piety and love for other Jews (*chassidus*)^[6], to humility? What if a person's Torah learning is not leading him to have more fear of Heaven, which means that one doesn't forget for a moment that Hashem is in front of him?

If a person is learning Torah yet he is not reaching any of these levels of growth, it is all a sign that the person is not reaching an *inner kind of life*. This is because the inner kind of life remains hidden and concealed from many people [so long as they don't search for it].

Of course, we do not doubt for a moment that it is Torah learning which brings a person to all of the qualities that one must acquire. Those are the unquestionable words of the Sages. The problem is not with the Torah. Rather, what we want to know is: why is it that a person can learn Torah yet he isn't changing and becoming a more spiritual person? It is all proof that there must be an inner kind of life that exists, which is often hidden and not accessed by many people, even as they learn Torah. Indeed, not everyone who learns Torah reaches all of the qualities that Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair describes.

It is because one must know where he is going in his life; what *directs* his life. To be clearer about this, our actual time during the day must mainly be spent in Torah learning. But it is just that along with this, we must know, clearly, what *direction* we are going in.

The Importance of Having A Pure Heart

It is written, "A pure heart you created me with." A person needs a *lev tahor*, a pure heart, in order to become strong in Torah and to become a *maayan hamisgaber* (mighty wellspring) in Torah.

A *lev tahor* is reached only when a person removes the various desires in his heart that are outside of Torah. A *lev tahor* refers to innermost will of the soul, which is the desire to do Hashem's will ("It is our will to do Your will").

However, the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) gets in our way and prevents us from having this holy desire. As the Sages say, "It is our will to do Your will, but the 'yeast in the sourdough' (a reference to the evil inclination), and the subjugation to the government, prevents us." The Sages also state that the *yetzer hora* resides in the left chamber of the heart, and the *yetzer tov* resides in the right chamber of the heart. So the *yetzer hora* is in our very heart and influencing our desires - until we remove its stronghold from our heart.

As long as the *yetzer hora* dominates within, a person has not yet reached what it means to have a "*lev tahor*" (pure heart). Therefore, one must become clear of what's going on in his heart. There's a lot going on in there, desires that are both good and evil, until one sorts them out and removes all of the bad desires there. This is a difficult task, because overcoming the hold of the *yetzer hora* is different with each person. Some people have a stronger *yetzer hora* to deal with than others. This is because as the Sages say, "One who is greater than his friend, has a greater [stronger] evil inclination."^[7]

Step One: Becoming Clear About Your Heart's Desires

So the first thing one must do is to become clear of what is in his heart - all of the good parts and the bad parts that are in there. If one does not become clear of both the good and evil taking place in his heart, he will not be able to reach a *lev tahor*.

One must ideally set up his life in a way that enables him to reach a *lev tahor*. For this reason, we have the normal *zman* of the year, which enables a person to spend his entire day immersed in Torah study, which places a person in an environment that is ideal to rid himself of desires that are outside of Torah and to desire only Torah.

Aspiring For A Pure Heart

How does a person reach a *lev tahor*? One needs a *lev tahor* in relation to himself, towards the Creator, and towards other people. If one does not search for a *lev tahor*, he will certainly not reach it (unless he learns Torah *lishmah*, which purifies a person's being entirely; but few people are at this level. The Vilna Gaon says that if one is not learning Torah 100% *lishmah*, it is not yet *lishmah*. One cannot be sure of this and that is why he must assume that he is not yet learning Torah *lishmah*).

One needs to leave the world with knowledge of Torah, but in order to be truly changed from this, one needs to have gained a *lev tahor*. If one is not setting up his life in a way that enables him to gain a *lev tahor*, he will not reach it.

We must take the path that our great leaders taught us, and we shouldn't budge from it (and there is no one way - there are always many valid paths), but within the mainstream path that we take, we must also seek to gain a *lev tahor* along the way. We must wonder how we can reach a *lev tahor*. When it comes to our brains, we seek to fill it with knowledge of Torah. What about our heart? What do we want to put in it? The Sages say that the "two kings" of man are the brain and the heart. Our heart must be just as important to us as our brain is to us.

Even if we have spent the *zman* immersed in Torah, this does not mean that our heart was always affected. When it comes vacation time\Bein HaZemanim, it is the litmus test that shows what's really going on in the person's heart....

Each person's heart is different. Reuven's heart is not like Shimon's heart. But the common denominator with all people is that we all must have an aspiration to leave the world of materialism and to gain a pure heart. This is not referring to uttering certain words, inspiration in prayer, or to moments of passing inspiration that come and go (although it is certainly wonderful to experience inspiration).

Just like a person can very much want to know a tractate of the Talmud and master it, so must a person have an aspiration to know what it means to have a pure heart; to be able to leave this world with a purified heart.

We must know this very clearly: As long as a person has not yet gained a *lev tahor*, his understanding in Torah is entirely superficial. Shlomo HaMelech said, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" Wisdom is not found in the brain, but in the heart. The knowledge contained in our brains is only superficial. Only when it reaches the heart is it real wisdom. A person with a *lev tahor* is able to absorb the wisdom that enters his brain\mind, and his heart becomes the deep source of his wisdom. The more a person purifies his heart, the sharper his understanding of wisdom\Torah will be.

This is not referring to mere 'knowledge of Torah'; there are many people who have a good memory and they can amass much knowledge in Torah, because their memory can retain everything. But this is not proof that a person truly comprehends what he is learning. The quality of one's comprehension in learning Torah is determined by how much he has purified his heart. The less a person has purified his heart (may Hashem have mercy on him), his comprehension of Torah does not get to the truthful meaning.

This is not something which others can always see. But Hashem sees straight into the hearts of each

person, and He knows if a person is purifying his heart and, accordingly, who is learning the Torah more truthfully.

Removing The Layers Upon The Heart

If a person truly wants to become closer to Hashem, it is brought in *Halacha* that he should imagine the four letters of Hashem's Name in front of him^[8]; and there were *tzaddikim* of the past who did this. But not everyone agreed with this approach, and it is certainly not the path that works for all people. How, then, can a person reach a kind of life where he feels that Hashem always in front of him?

When a person has a *lev tahor*, he feels the simple reality, of Hashem's presence. He feels it as a simple sense. Why is it that a person does not feel Hashem in front of him, when it is the most simple fact that exists, and He is clearly everywhere? It is because although He is found everywhere, He is also always hidden.

We cannot see Him with our physical eyes, but our soul can sense His presence, no less than how it can feel its own existence. We can always feel ourselves as existing, whether it is night or day, whether we are smart or foolish, whether we are happy or sad, whether we are thinking clearly or our minds are foggy, whether we are having a good day or a bad day. We always feel our existence. When one feels the truth of his existence – the fact that he is a soul, which is a “piece of G-d”, then he will feel the Creator no less than how he can feel his own existence. This is not a profound thought; it is a simple awareness.

But what prevents us from feeling this simple recognition? Why is it that this simple fact has no place in many people's lives?

There are people who spent the entire day learning Torah and they feel that life is all about keeping *Halacha* and to know the whole Torah, yet they are not paying attention to the first line of *Shulchan Aruch*, which states that one must place Hashem in front of him at all times. This is all because a person is missing a *lev tahor*. When a person does not have a *lev tahor*, there is a thick blockage upon his heart (*orlas halev*) which prevents him from seeing even the simplest facts.

When a person has not reached his *lev tahor*, he is feeling his existence through the external layers of the heart, which are impure and which conceal the heart's inner layer. All that he will feel in his heart is negative emotions such as jealousy, lust, and the desire for honor. This is not just an indicator of what he *wants* deep down; it is what he *senses*. When he feels a desire for honor, he is pulled after it. When he feels a lust, he is pulled after it. He is essentially pulled after his senses!

To illustrate, a two-year old child is not looking for honor; when he gets a bit older, the heart begins to open, the *yetzer hora* present in the heart begins to make its appearance, and he begins to sense different feelings now. He begins to feel what honor is, so he wants honor. He feels a lust, so he lusts after it. He feels jealousy, so he wants to be jealous.

But when a person purifies his heart, he removes the barriers that are upon it, and the simple sense of the heart (to feel Hashem's presence) is revealed. It was there all along, but it was just covered over and concealed, with various desires: jealousy, lust, honor, etc. That is what he sensed until he removed the obstacles from upon his heart. After removing the layers that were blocking his heart's inner essence, he is no longer pulled after his sensual desires and emotions. He can now feel the simplest and truest sense of all: the presence of Hashem. It is *known* to all people, but not everyone *feels* it, for this very reason.

Upon reaching this inner layer of the heart, one can truly connect to the Torah he learns after that.

This is a far deeper connection to the Torah than what he has been used to as a child, if he has grown up in an environment of Torah. Growing up in a Torah environment and learning Torah as a child is all an opening to enter the world of Torah. One should not remain at that level, even though it was wonderful that he grew up learning Torah.

If one remains as an adult connected to the Torah because that is what he has been used to since he was a child and because he went to yeshiva, and this is what connects him to Torah even now as he in *Kolel*, this is called *katnus mochin* (small-mindedness; immaturity). Although there is such a concept as *girsas d'yankusa* (the way a person is used to from how he grew up as a child), that is only meant to serve as an opening which allows a person to grow further from there. It is an opening that allows a person to reach the 'simple point' of the heart, where one realizes that there is nothing in reality except Hashem and His Torah. That is where our life is found.

A person often feels very far from this point, but it is because there are many layers upon his heart which aren't allowing him to feel this. Those layers include his various desires and negative emotions.

As long as a person has not yet clarified to himself what goes on in his heart and he has not attempted to uproot the evil that lays dormant in his heart, even if he learns a lot of Torah and he does many mitzvos and he does a lot of *chessed*, he still will not reach the simplest sense which can be felt. He will think that feeling Hashem's presence is a high level that is only for *tzaddikim* and that it is not for us regular people. In a way, he is correct, because he is not connected to that place.

When a person is clear about this, he doesn't see purity of heart as a daunting task upon him. Instead, he sees it as a tool that is absolutely necessary to understand Torah.

Utilizing Bein HaZemanim: Becoming Clear About Our Heart

The issue is: what kind of direction a person is heading towards in his life. How is a person living? Is he living life in a way that enables him to reach a *lev tahor*? Is he actively striving towards it?

When it comes *Bein HaZemanim*, one can use these days to explore what's going on in his heart and thereby gaining clarity towards his heart, and he can wonder how he can lead his life in a direction that leads towards a *lev tahor*. Then his exertion in Torah will be coming from a much more truthful place in himself.

The words were just an opener that can help one begin to search for truth. Hopefully by the time it is Elul, you will have gained more clarity from these reflections, about the path you are taking in life and if it is enabling you to reach a *lev tahor*. This will enhance our Torah learning as well, for it enables us to have a true understanding in what we learn in the Torah. Of course, our understanding in Torah comes from exertion in Torah, but it also needs to be accompanied with a *lev tahor*: to feel the existence of Hashem, as a simple sense.

In Conclusion

Practically speaking, in order to prepare for the coming Elul, try to gain clarity in the direction you are taking in life, in the way you spend your schedule, and seek how you can make it more inner; so that the Torah you learn should be coming from a more truthful place in yourself. This will bring blessing to your Torah learning, and it will merit you to have true *d'veykus* with Hashem and with His Torah.

[1] The Rav is talking about the late Rav Aryeh Finkel zt"l, the Rosh Yeshivah of Mir-Brachfeld.

[2] Master of the world

[3] *Orach Chaim 1:1*

[4] Refer also to ***48 Ways of Torah_020_Feeling Hashem In Your Learning***

[5] Avodah Zarah 20b; these words form the basis of sefer *Mesillas Yesharim*

[6] Refer to the *Bilvavi* on *Mesillas Yesharim*, in the section on *chassidus*

[7] Sukkah 52a

[8] *Mishnah Berurah 1:4*

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